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THE DECLINING BIRTH-RATE

BY THE
REV. HERBERT THURSTON, S.J.



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Social Questions and the Duty of Catholics

BY

CHARLES STANTON DEVAS, M.A.

WITH PREFACE BY THE

RIGHT REV. MGR. CANON PARKINSON, D.D.

I. The Political Economy of Leo XIII.

II. Is Socialism Right after All?

"This booklet is occupied with the foundations and general structure of the Christian Social State. The Family and Divorce, Property and Small Holdings, Christian Democracy and State Socialism, Equality, Rank, Progress and the respective duties of employers and employed, are all discussed in the light of Christian principles. . . . The grand pronouncements of Leo XIII, which were addressed for the most part to the learned, are here adapted to the education and conditions of the general reader. This adaptation is not intended as a manual of practical social work, but forms a systematic code of Christian principles covering the entire field of social life, and leaving particular applications and adaptations to circumstances of race, legislation and locality."—*Extract from Preface.*

THE DECLINING BIRTH-RATE

BY THE REV. HERBERT THURSTON, S.J.¹

THE general and persistent fall in the birth-rate (i.e. in the number of children annually born per thousand of population) has long engaged the attention of political economists. This decline has taken place on such a scale in nearly all the more progressive countries of the world that it has at last come to be looked upon as a danger, the nature and causes of which call for organized investigation. Some short time before the present war began, a voluntary but fairly representative Commission was formed to inquire into the problems involved—so far at any rate as they affected the United Kingdom. The Report of the Commissioners, now at last published in 1916,² has claims upon the attention of all public-spirited Catholics, partly on account of its bearing on the question of population at a time when the manhood strength of each country is seen to be a vital factor in its military effectiveness, but still more urgently because the moral problems involved are of supreme importance to religion and have been definitely pronounced upon by the Church in a way which leaves no room for difference of opinion.

¹ Reprinted from *The Month*.

² *The Declining Birth-Rate, its Causes and Effects*. London Chapman and Hall. 1916.

Although this Report of the National Birth-Rate Commission has appeared at a very appropriate moment, and although we find ourselves thoroughly in agreement with the general drift of its conclusions, still we must confess that in more than one respect the document is likely to prove a little discouraging to economists who are striving to bring about a higher standard of public morals. We propose to say something later on upon certain aspects of this important subject which have either been ignored or which have failed to elicit any satisfactory pronouncement in the Report, but the natural course is to consider first of all the gains acquired, and these are by no means contemptible. It is something to have it put permanently upon record, as the result of eighteen months' examination of witnesses, supplemented by the deliberations of those who have a claim to be regarded as experts, that while the birth-rate of the United Kingdom during the last thirty years has fallen by one-third, that is to say roughly from 36 per thousand inhabitants to 24 per thousand,

"(1) this decline is not, to any important extent, due to alterations in the marriage-rate, to a rise of the mean age at marriage, or to other causes diminishing the proportion of married women of fertile age in the population ;

"(2) that this decline, though general, has not been uniformly distributed over all sections of the community ;

"(3) that on the whole the decline has been more marked in the more prosperous classes."¹

Even more important is the further conclusion,

¹ *Report*, p. 37.

which may be thus stated in language somewhat less technical than that of the Commissioners, viz. that while it is not denied that infant mortality is greater in the less prosperous classes than among the well-to-do, none the less the balance of fertility is still on the side of the former. In other words the surviving children in the families of the poor still on the average notably outnumber the proportion of children in the more carefully tended families of the wealthy.¹

Another point upon which the Commissioners feel justified in expressing a definite opinion is in connection with the higher education of women. In their judgement there is no reason to believe that mental training or intellectual pursuits (whatever the indirect results upon the birth-rate may be) have any important effect in diminishing a woman's physiological aptitude to bear children. Lastly, and, as it would seem, partly from direct evidence, partly as the result of the process of eliminating other suggested causes, the conviction is reached that—

“Conscious limitation of fertility is widely practised among the middle and upper classes, and there is good reason to think that, in addition to other means of limitation, the illegal induction of abortion frequently occurs among the industrial population.”²

We must confess that in this matter the Commissioners seem to us to express their opinion with

¹ *Report*, pp. 9, 37.

² *Report*, p. 37, and cf. *ibid.* pp. 20, 21.

Again Miss Elderton says :

"There will be undoubtedly those who will, and possibly on the evidence of the present report, associate the decline in the birth-rate with the growing emancipation of women. They will point to the undoubted fact that where, as in the textile and woollen towns, there is much employment of women, there the birth-rate has fallen more quickly and markedly than in the metal-working or mining districts. We accept this fact but we do not accept the inference from it. There has always been a very large amount of female labour right back even to the time of home industries in these textile and woollen districts. The reason for the more rapid fall in these districts is, we think, due to two causes. When pressure makes the wage earned by the woman an essential factor in the household economy, a large family not only increases the expenditure, but removes for a greater or less period one source of income, the mother's work. In the engineering or mining districts, where the man earns a higher income than the male textile or woollen worker, pressure makes him feel the increased expenditure caused by a large family, but a new birth does not in itself cut off any source of income. Thus the process of restricting the family would have greater force behind it in the woollen and cotton than in the mining and engineering districts."^x

Miss Elderton, as the result, be it repeated, of most minute and laborious researches, goes so directly to the root of the whole matter that we offer no excuse for another long quotation. The history of perhaps the most momentous movement in English social life is ably summarized in the following passage :

"The Bradlaugh-Besant trial and the propagandism which preceded and followed it have too close a chrono-

^x Elderton, p. 235.

logical relation to the start in the fall of the birth-rate to be put aside as secondary matter. A great industrial boom . . . had given all classes of the community not only a higher standard of ordinary living but an acquaintance with luxuries which became necessities. When depression followed, the problem arose as to which of the least necessary things should be dispensed with. The child, owing to factory and educational legislation, had become more and more a protracted source of expenditure; the moral leaders of the people had taught that the parents had 'no right' to children unless they could support them and this theory had replaced the old evangelical doctrine that 'it is God who sends children and He will in due course provide for them.' The better-class workman began to understand that his progress as well as his comfort were handicapped by a large family. . . . At such a moment the propagandism of Bradlaugh and Besant . . . struck fruitful soil. Their teaching would have had little force had it not found a population seeking for economic reasons a divorce between marriage and parentage. Their propagandism might again have made little way had it been purely, as it is largely to-day, a commercial speculation of the vendors of preventives; but Bradlaugh was a man well known throughout England, and whether his views were right or wrong he was honest in his convictions and personally respected. The gravity of the trial, notorious as it was, was far from recognized at the time; it legitimized the teaching of practical methods for the limitation of the family, and within thirty years that teaching has revolutionized the sexual habits of the English people. It has destroyed the pressure which carried an English population as the great colonizing force into every quarter of the globe, and it may be that coming centuries will recognize the Bradlaugh trial as the knell of the British colonial empire—and as the real summons to Slavs, Chinese and other fertile races to occupy the spare places of the earth."¹

¹ Elderton, pp. 234, 235.

Again stress is wisely laid upon the terrible danger of a social tradition of this kind, once it has taken firm root.

"Then, when the pressure was over, a new habit which checked expansion had not been learnt. To-day a boom in the mining industry would not be followed, as that of 1871 was, by a rise in the birth-rate, but by an immigration of Polish or other foreign workers."¹

What renders Miss Elderton's conclusions so convincing, founded as they are upon a minute study of local conditions, is the circumstance that her theory of a deliberate restriction, through devices of which the knowledge is communicated orally from one to another, explains intelligibly the anomalies of the observed facts. Let us take for example the following birth-rates, remembering that the figures used by Miss Elderton represent, not the crude birth-rate of infants born per thousand inhabitants, but the number of infants born per hundred married women. We have added the form of occupation characteristic of each locality.²

		1871.	1881.	1891.	1901.
Huddersfield (textiles)	...	22·5	20·2	16·3	14·2
Preston (textiles)		24·6	27·9	22·6	18·7
Blackburn (textiles and iron)		25·3	23·2	21·0	15·5
Liverpool (docks, etc.)	...	20·6	20·0	20·0	20·9
Sunderland (sea and iron)...		24·6	24·7	24·3	23·0
Wigan (coal)		27·8	26·5	28·0	24·7

¹ Elderton, p. 235.

² If it should seem that these figures, which do not come down any later than 1901, are unsatisfactory, the reader must remember that the data necessary to standardize such results can only be worked out laboriously and slowly. The deductions

Now, in the textile towns like Huddersfield, Bradford, Halifax,¹ Preston, etc., the women went to the mills and factories long before 1871. In those early years the number of children born in the textile towns was not notably less than those born in mining towns or in country districts. The mere employment of women in the mills did not render them less fertile. Be it noted, however, that at that date, before the Education Act and the later Factory Act, "a young child in the manufacturing North could almost keep itself and at ten years of age was an asset to the parents."² Nowadays a child is an encumbrance until 12 or 14 years old. This transformation of the child from asset into encumbrance would alone account for much, and the encumbrance is of course the greater if the mother works in a factory. But, as Miss Elderton conclusively shows, there was another set of causes in operation which in certain districts made the restriction propaganda all too easy. No account of this can be more clear and concise than that given by Miss Elderton herself :

"There is further a most important factor, which must not be overlooked, namely, the relative ease with which knowledge can be conveyed and a tradition established.

to be drawn from the census of 1901 were not available when Miss Elderton compiled her report. There is, however, no reason to believe that the situation has changed otherwise than for the worse in recent years.

¹ In Bradford and Halifax the birth-rate in 1901, as calculated per 100 married women, was even lower than in Huddersfield. It was 13·8 and 13·5 respectively.

² Elderton, p. 45.

We have seen in our detailed account that knowledge is conveyed largely from mouth to mouth, to some extent by advertisement and occasionally by lecture in the open market-place. In a district where there are no factories general communication in such matters is very slow, and the population, especially if largely rural (although the agriculturist is now beginning to be affected), has not been so early or so deeply stirred as the urban districts. In the mining districts again, the cottages are largely isolated, there is no centre like a factory bringing many women together, and much of the underground work in the case of the men is very isolated ; thus, as we might expect, we actually find that the mining districts follow the purely rural, and those on which relatively small impression has been made by prevention propagandism. Next come the engineering and metal-working towns in which the men congregate together but the women do not, and lastly we reach in the textile and woollen towns, with the joint industrial occupation of both men and women, the greatest opportunity for the spread of new knowledge and for the creation of tradition. What is here true of restriction of the family is equally applicable to the spread of any new habit or fashion, or the adoption of any new food or form of amusement ; the factory towns are the places where advertisement is most profitable, and where information is most rapidly disseminated." *

This explanation seems sufficiently to meet the facts as recorded in Huddersfield, Blackburn, Sunderland, and Wigan. But what is to be said of a city like Liverpool, an almost unique example of a great town where the birth-rate has actually risen, or of Preston, pre-eminently a centre of textile manufactures, where, though there has been a fall, the decline has been not only notably slower but notably

* P. 236.

less in amount than at Huddersfield, Halifax, Bradford, and other such towns? Miss Elderton does not hesitate to admit that "the Irish element is the source of the unique position of Liverpool" in comparison with other Lancashire cities,¹ but she accompanies her encomium with a lament that "its population appears to be inferior in skill and intelligence to nearly all the towns wherein the birth-rate is rapidly declining." It strikes us as an almost solitary weak point in Miss Elderton's monograph that she seems to take it for granted that destitution and thriftlessness in the parents of necessity imply unfitness in the offspring. No doubt taking our slum population as a whole the rule is a fairly safe one to follow, but speaking upon information furnished by those who have an intimate acquaintance with the children of the Irish substratum in Liverpool, we emphatically hold that these particular guttersnipes cannot be in any way regarded as "unfit." The level of natural intelligence is exceptionally high, and it is not among them that we find the largest proportion of those that are rickety, malformed, and mentally deficient. Miss Elderton carries her unfavourable estimate so far that she throws out the suggestion, though with hesitation, that the high birth-rate among the Irish of Liverpool may be due more to the fact that "they have been too ignorant to learn methods of limiting their families," than to the teaching of the Church that all such practices are sinful. "Catholicism," she

¹ Elderton, p. 70.

remarks, "has not saved France," though she has the honesty to add the query, "but are the French really as devout as the Irish?"

Of course the whole point lies there. Catholicism which is merely Catholicism in name, and which amounts to no more in the supposed believer than a vague purpose of sending for a priest when he is dying, is not likely to have any restraining effect upon the decline of the birth-rate. Further, it is precisely because a really practical Catholicism lays such restrictions upon freedom in this and other matters, that members of the educated and comfortable classes, the men especially, are prone to emancipate themselves from all religious control with an anti-clerical rancour hardly known in Protestant lands. Had it not been for these defections from her teaching, the Catholic Church, in most countries of mixed religion, would soon become predominant by the mere force of natural fertility. Even as it is, we believe that a country like France owes such small measure of natural increase as she still retains almost entirely to the religious principle of the faithful few. Where the Catholic Church preserves her sway over the hearts of men the maintenance of a vigorous stock is assured. Even in the general retrogression observable in England to-day, it is probable that Catholicism counts for a good deal, as Miss Elderton admits in the case in Liverpool, Leigh, and one or two other centres. The highest town birth-rate in England at present is St. Helens, where in 1912 it stood at 32·3 per

1,000 inhabitants, with a natural increase of 16.9; and here the Catholic element is very strong. The same is true of Middlesbrough and Sunderland, which have birth-rates of 31.9 and 31.6. Again, if Preston, a textile town, presents much better figures than such other centres of the textile industry as Halifax and Bradford, there can be little doubt that the large Catholic population of Preston is mainly responsible for this relative superiority.

From many points of view the vital statistics of Holland are peculiarly interesting to the student who wishes to estimate the bearing of religious and notably of Catholic teaching upon the growth of population. Dr. C. V. Drysdale,¹ who gave evidence before the National Commission as the representative of the Malthusian League of which he is the Secretary, appeals with peculiar satisfaction to the state of Holland as "the only country where Neo-Malthusianism has been given the opportunity of diminishing the excessive birth-rate on eugenic lines, *i.e.* in the reduction of the fertility of the poorest classes." And he adds that a "considerable rise in the wages and general prosperity appears to have taken place side by side with an unprecedented increase of population." Now Holland from a religious point of view is peculiarly constituted.

¹ Dr. Drysdale is the author of a work called *The Small Family System*, London, 1913. This appeared with a Preface by a Dr. Binnie Dunlop who afterwards wrote on the subject in the *Nineteenth Century*, April 1915, and with regard to whom see *The Month*, May 1915, p. 528, "Malthusian Mendacities."

Two of its eleven provinces, North Brabant, with 649,000 inhabitants, and Limburg, with 358,000 inhabitants, are almost entirely Catholic.¹ On the other hand, in Friesland the Catholics do not number more than 8 per cent. in a population of 366,000. If we take the figures for 1913, we find that in Limburg the crude birth-rate is 33·4, in North Brabant it is 32·5, but in Friesland it is 24·3.² Of course this is not the beginning and end of the matter. In North Brabant the death-rate is 16·36, in Limburg it is 15·28, in Friesland it is only 11·21,³ but the fact remains that in the two Catholic provinces the natural increase is 16·17 and 18·15, while in the non-Catholic province of Friesland it is 13·15. Further, no one can doubt that in such densely populated districts as North and South Holland and Gelderland, the Catholics, who number more than 25 per cent. of the inhabitants, exercise a perceptible influence in raising the birth-rate figures for the whole kingdom. The results would be very different if the entire country adopted neo-Malthusian

¹ In Limburg, according to the census of 1899, 98 per cent. of the people are Catholic, in North Brabant 88 per cent.

² See the official *Statistiek van den Loop der Bevolking* for 1913 (*Bijdragen*, No. 207).

³ The rates of infant mortality in Limburg and North Brabant in 1913 were 200 and 210, that in Friesland was 96 per 1,000. For the rest of Holland the infant mortality was over 100. In 1914 we get for Limburg 205, for North Brabant 215, for Friesland 105. See the *Jaarverslag van het Staatstoezicht op de Volksgezondheid* for 1913 and for 1914. We cannot, however, for a moment admit the contention of the Neo-Malthusians that the connection between great fertility and a high rate of infant mortality is a necessary one.

principles. Another remarkable example is furnished by the predominantly Catholic province of Quebec in Canada. Quoting the figures for 1911, the latest to which for the moment we have access, the crude birth-rate was 37·18 per 1,000 inhabitants, and even the relatively high death-rate of 17·92 still leaves a natural increase of 19·26, or an expansion of nearly 2 per cent. per annum. The Canadians of Quebec are of course a French stock, and this fact alone would suffice to show the extreme improbability of the suggestion that the present low birth-rate in France is due to any decay of natural fertility.

As for Ireland itself, although the subject is but slightly touched upon in the Report,¹ still the evidence given by Dr. Stevenson, the Superintendent representing the Registrar-General, as to the remarkable features presented by the birth statistics throughout the country, but most notably in Connaught, sets the matter in a very fair light. On a first view the crude birth-rate, which in 1911 was 22·3 (*i.e.* per 1,000 total population), suggests a condition of things even more deplorable than that which prevails in England and Wales. But this, as he explains, is wholly fallacious owing to the remarkably small proportion of young married women left in Connaught after long years of systematic emigration. If, on the other hand, we calculate the proportion of births to the total number of married women of child-bearing age, then Connaught yields a rate of 45·3 as against 24·7

¹ *Report*, p. 65.

for this country. Neither does Dr. Stevenson shirk the obvious conclusion that this remarkable difference in the two adjacent islands must find its explanation in the fact that

“artificial restraint has become more prevalent in England, whereas the Irish increase represents the natural result of increased prosperity in the case of a population amongst whom the religious bar to such restraint is effective.”¹

We must own to a certain feeling of disappointment at the absence in the Report, so far as we have observed, of any formal and explicit condemnation of the Neo-Malthusian propaganda which is actively carried on in many of our great towns. We should have liked to be able to quote some unequivocal utterance that might have served as a fulcrum in any future demand for Parliamentary legislation. No doubt Dr. C. V. Drysdale, who, as already mentioned, gave evidence before the Commission, was subjected to a very sifting cross-examination. Moreover the Report, by implication, conveys clearly enough the opinion of the Commissioners that a promiscuously diffused knowledge of the means of preventing conception is undesirable.² But there is no direct mention of the Malthusian League in the official utterances printed in the volume, and the general impression left is that, in order to secure unanimity, the Report everywhere abstains from anything but the most guarded expression of opinion, and does very little more than summarize

¹ *Report*, p. 351.

² *Ibid.* pp. 69, 70.

the evidence taken. Still more urgently, as we judge, a pronouncement was called for on that most demoralizing and utterly fallacious axiom of the Malthusians, that the death-rate varies directly on the birth-rate, and that in consequence a rising birth-rate inevitably leads to an increase in the rate of mortality. On two occasions of late years has this pernicious principle been put forward, in perhaps the most widely influential of our reviews,¹ as if it were the last word of expert statistical science. And yet it runs counter both to common sense and to the teaching of the highest authorities and was defended in both the articles named by a barefaced misstatement and suppression of figures accessible to inquirers in any public library.² The fact undoubtedly is that a considerable infantile mortality is generally associated with a high birth-rate, because such high birth-rates are nowadays hardly ever found except among those strata of the population that are thriftless and lacking in adequate instruction about sanitary and other important matters,³ but that there is any necessary causal connection between birth-rate and death-rate is a logical absurdity. A very simple proof may be furnished by the following consideration. Suppose that medical and sanitary science made such

¹ In *The Nineteenth Century and After*, by Dr. Rigby, in February 1914, and by Dr. Binnie Dunlop, in April 1915.

² See the *Tablet*, February 14, 1914, and *Month*, May 1915.

³ There are numberless exceptions, the most conspicuous being Connaught, where, though the birth-rate is exceptionally high, the infantile mortality is very low.

progress that every cause of death were eliminated except accident and senile decay. We should then have, of course, for a long time an absolutely minimum death-rate. Whether many infants were born or few, no one, practically speaking, would die but octogenarians and nonagenarians, and naturally the number of these would at first be small, because the majority under less ideal conditions die off long before they reach that term. But by degrees, since nobody was ever carried off in youth, the number of those who attained a great age would each year become larger and larger. Even though the birth-rate were reduced until no children were born at all, we should still have a steadily increasing death-rate until the point was reached when the deaths were equal in number to the births of eighty years before. Of course this is a *reductio ad absurdum*, but its logical force is unanswerable.

Furthermore, it is one of the brighter features of recent medical and social science that it has shown us how very much can be done to check infant mortality even among the most unpromising surroundings. The recently published Milroy Lectures of Dr. S. G. Moore are most illuminating in this regard.¹ If only, without injury to the educational and physical needs of the young, we could restore that condition of things which existed before 1876, and in which the child was felt among the lower orders to be an asset to its parents, there can be little doubt that both the decline in the birth-rate

¹ Published in *The Lancet*, April 22, April 29, May 6, 1916.

would be arrested and that infantile mortality would decrease. In this last matter a Mayor of Huddersfield, Mr. Benjamin Broadbent, has recently set an example which deserves to be imitated.

"On November 10, 1905, in his mayoral address to the Council, he announced that he would make a birthday gift to each child born in his native village of Longwood, during his year of office as mayor, on its attaining its first birthday. To this end he issued a promissory note, to the amount of £1 sterling, to each child at birth, payable on the infant's first birthday."

A very similar expedient seems to have been adopted in the initial stages of that marvellous experiment that has been carried out by Dr. Morel de Villiers in his native village in Southern France, and by which for many years together the infant mortality was reduced to zero.

Another point in which the Commissioners' Report has disappointed us is the absence of all reference to the uncontrolled sale of preventives and in particular to those abominable "india rubber" shops in which pornographic literature, undesirable medical knowledge and contraceptives under thin disguises are retailed to all who care to present themselves. There are at least twenty such establishments within a radius of a quarter of a mile from Tottenham Court Road Station, and the number seems to be continually on the increase.

Although we may have seemed in the course of this pamphlet to give undue prominence to the regret-

table position of affairs among the industrial classes, and notably the textile workers, it is not to be denied that a still heavier responsibility rests with those who belong to a higher level in the social scale. The birth-rate of Bournemouth (18·4) is lower than that of Halifax (18·7) or Huddersfield (19·3), and nearly as low as that of Bradford (17·95); while Brighton (21·2) treads close upon the heels of Blackburn (20·1) and Burnley (20·3).¹ All these seven towns, as Dr. Stevenson points out, "are either textile towns where the conditions of life impose a direct financial penalty on motherhood, or residential towns with an exceptionally large middle-class element in their population." Undoubtedly selfishness, or at any rate the gospel of comfort, seems to have infected the upper and middle classes most deeply of all. If we may take the number of children born in the families of married males as a standard of comparison, according to the occupations of their fathers, we find that the proportion works out thus—Upper and Middle Class 119, Skilled Workmen 153, Unskilled Workmen 213; if we descend to more precise details, we have such pronounced examples as these—Textile Workers 125, Costers 175, Miners 230, Dock Labourers 231, Doctors, Solicitors, and Clergymen 102, the rates being calculated per 1,000 married males under 55 years. No doubt prudential motives weigh most pardonably in the case of the struggling professional classes, who feel that both

¹ *Report*, p. 351. Evidence of Dr. Stevenson.

they and their offspring have a certain standard of respectability to maintain with quite inadequate means ; but it is also impossible to resist the conviction that in too many instances the dominant forces at work are selfishness and cowardice. Without wishing to make too much of a single and no doubt exceptional example, a story told by one of the witnesses, Dr. J. W. Ballantyne, a distinguished gynæcologist, throws a rather lurid light upon the attitude towards motherhood of some of our ladies of fashion.

“One day [said the witness], some four or five years ago, a lady called at my house. She said, ‘I do not wish to give you my name, but I wish you to tell me if I am in the family way.’ It did not take me very long to tell that ; it was quite simple. I said, ‘You are.’ She said, ‘I wish you very much to take in hand the destruction’—I am not giving you the exact words, but she meant the ending of the pregnancy. I said, ‘Why?’ She said, ‘It is not convenient just now to have a child.’ I tried to talk her out of it, but I found she was quite set upon it, and I said, ‘I do not do that sort of thing,’ and she said, ‘Oh, I thought that doctors did it,’ and she rose up and said, ‘Then, I suppose you can do nothing for me?’ I said, ‘No.’ I did not say I was sorry ; I just simply said ‘No, I can do nothing for you,’ and then she got up and went towards the door. I said, ‘Before you leave, I would like you to have the three reasons in my mind at the present moment which led me to give you the advice which I have given. In the first place the life you are talking about is a life ; it is not a negligible quantity ; it is a life and I do not wish to destroy life. In the second place the operation which would be necessary for it cannot be done with absolute safety to the mother, and I do not wish to do anything which would endanger your health ; but in

the third place I do not wish to do anything which might make me liable to penal servitude.' She said, 'I suppose you expect a fee for this.' I do not know whether the Commission think I was right or not, but I said, 'No, I do not; I would like to show you the door as soon as possible.'"¹

Perhaps some of the most interesting matter provided in the Report is given in connection with the Housing Question, and we may note that here, as in almost every other department of the inquiry, Mgr. W. F. Brown, the Vicar-General of Southwark, leaves the impression upon the reader of having proved himself one of the most capable and clear-thinking, as well as one of the most hard-working, of all the members of the Commission. His detailed statement of the Catholic attitude towards the moral problems involved in the whole question of birth limitation is admirably clear.² But on the Housing Question the following passage from the evidence of Mrs. Burgwin tells us much in a relatively small space.

"The housing question is a very serious problem, because you handicapped the working man with his family when you dealt under the powers of the Borough Councils with what you call overcrowding. I mean by that this kind of thing. A visitor goes to a house and sees a woman with four children, and says, 'You have only two rooms, and there are six of you in those two rooms. You must have another room.' I visited that family a little while ago and found the woman crying. I asked her, 'Did the lady say she would pay for the third room?'

¹ *Report*, p. 175.

² *Ibid.* pp. 389-95.

This is the point. It is very well, but they do not know how to pay another three shillings. They pay exorbitant rents, for the wages they earn, and you make it almost impossible for a working man with more than a couple of children to get into decent rooms and live in decent houses. We have by our regulations, not thinking out their effects, made ourselves greatly responsible for the present position of the birth-rate amongst certainly the feeble and the poor.”¹

We may confess that we are thoroughly in agreement with Mgr. Brown and Mrs. Burgwin in this matter. And there are other questions, notably the educational legislation and the factory legislation, in which “not thinking out their effects” we have created more problems than we have solved. Education, for example, is a good thing, but what avails it to educate our poor like little gentlemen on the chance that one in a hundred may improve his social position if the chance ever comes in his way? The vast majority must inevitably earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, and we believe that they will be all the happier and more contented with their lot if, with due regard for youthful infirmity and the acquisition of the bare essentials of learning, they begin that process early.

Be it said in conclusion that no one can think without deep sympathy of the hard cases which must often arise from the uncompromising strictness of the Church’s law in prohibiting any artificial restriction of the family. To have to choose between abstention from all conjugal relations and that *res*

¹ *Report*, p. 219.

angusta domi which amounts to relative starvation, is a cruel alternative. Yet the wisdom of the Church's intransigent attitude was never more manifest than at the present time. Let us hope, with Mgr. Brown, that an alleviation, if not a complete remedy, may be found in the social legislation of the future. In regard to the Housing Problem, as he points out, "a step in the right direction has been taken in the Finance Act by granting some remission of income tax in proportion to the number of children in the family." But Mgr. Brown goes further, and he did not hesitate in his evidence to tell the Commission :

"At the risk of being called a collectivist, I do maintain that as parents discharge a duty for the community in reproducing the community, the community has a positive obligation not only to the very poor parent, but also to the parent of limited means who has a large family" (pp. 395-96).

[P.S.—As this essay was written after the beginning of the war, and as all vital statistics since that date have been materially affected and their normal developments disorganised by that great cataclysm, it will be sufficient to note that though a sudden and very considerable rise in the birth-rate for England and Wales took place in 1920, no inference can thereby be drawn as to the continuance in the future of this better order of things.—H.T.]

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